

# Local radio station serves up vital weather information

## CABLE FAILS, LISTENERS GET UPDATES FROM WWJB

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**BROOKSVILLE** — Steve Manual and his wife, Barbara, have slept on couch cushions on the floor of their offices in downtown Brooksville for six days and counting.

For the two owners of the Brooksville-based AM radio station WWJB it's been an exhausting week. "My mind is so foggy; the days have run together," said Steve. Never mind the possibility that Hurricane Ivan may hit Tuesday. "I refuse to believe it," Steve said. "Holy smoke, I don't think we can make it through another one right now."

Multi-million dollar news organizations across the state pounced on Hurricane Frances long before she blew ashore on the east coast of

## HURRICANE HEROES

Florida last Saturday afternoon. Television stations launched 24-hour storm coverage. Newspapers dissected forecasts and weather data.

But when the storm arrived in Hernando County, many saw their cable television cut and the lights go out.

For thousands of Hernando County residents trapped in homes and stuck in public shelters, there was only one place left to turn for information —

their local, family-owned radio station.

And the broadcast continued uninterrupted, despite the chaos outside.

"We're downtown, on a hill, in a two-story office building where the ceiling tiles were vibrating because of the wind coming in under the eaves," Steve said. "The thought occurs to you, what sort of wind would it take to blow the roof off?"

It's not often that a storm as damaging as Frances strikes the county.

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A MEDIA GENERAL NEWSPAPER

HERNANDO TODAY  
15299 Cortez Blvd.  
Brooksville FL 34613  
Main number: (352) 544-5200  
VOL. 18, No. 256

## HEROES

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But the Manuals have seen their fair share since purchasing the station in March of 1982.

"The no-name storm — we had trees down, power down, flooding at Bayport, Pine Island, Hernando Beach — that really was the last time that we've had a problem,"

Manual said.

"But it's really an emotionally stressful situation when it's just one hurricane after another. We know a lot of people are tuned into us for help and information, and you want to be able to provide that."

The Manuals and six broadcasters — Bob Haa, J.R. Scicluna, Peggy Hope, Jason Youngman, Chris Fickley and Bob Penrod — worked around the clock during the past week to give weather updates, announcements from county

green tomatoes, and help

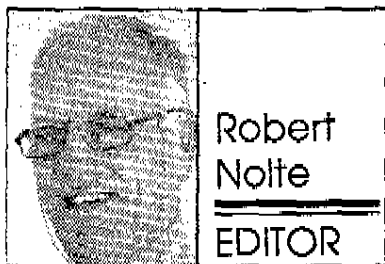
officials and sometimes just a calming presence in the homes and cars of listeners.

"We try to be a friendly voice in the darkness," said Manual, who worked at the station as a high school student before purchasing it years later.

"I'm so glad we were here to do it. We've gotten thank-you notes, cookies, brownies and we can't go anywhere without people stopping us," said Barbara Manual. "We were more than happy to help."

*Radio to the rescue*

## Pulling together, Hernando-style



**Robert  
Nolte**  
EDITOR

Most folks were prepared for some kind of storm but not the wallop this monster produced.

Some natives said it was the worst they'd ever seen. Many of those hardest hit said they were not notified soon enough about the storm's severity and the need to evacuate.

When the storm's full force was realized, however, Hernando County pulled together. One of the laces that brought people the realization that this storm was more dangerous than they'd been told was WWJB radio.

The small country music station in Brooksville opened its microphones to help those who needed information on power outages, evacuation shelters, weather and other critical news items.

### Only news source

Grateful callers told announcers Deanna Daymer and Glynn Alan that the radio station had become their only source of information during the worst hours of the storm.

"You're the only radio station I can get," said one lady on the air. "What's the weather going to be?"

Police, emergency workers and power company employees listened to WWJB and phoned information to answer some of the questions being asked of Daymer, Alan and two other announcers, Chad Lewis and John Puzio, who kept the station on the air past midnight sign-off to keep the flow of information going.

It was radio at its best, filling void left by Tampa Bay television and radio stations which simply could not satisfy the county's hunger for news.

The public service effort may even have saved lives. Some stranded Hernando Beach residents called WWJB from their roof-tops pleading for somebody to come rescue them.

They were plucked from their homes by emergency workers who had been listening to the radio.

### More than inconvenient

As Saturday progressed, listeners realized that western Hernando County was being devastated by a storm weather officials would later call a winter hurricane. Families were losing everything they owned; in some cases, homes were being flattened, businesses flooded out, cars sub-



**Residents of the Rogers Park area gusted at times to near-100 mph a merged and residents snatched by helicopter from roofs.**

As County Commission Chairman Tony Mosca said, the storm was more than an inconvenience, it was a disaster. Mosca and fellow-commissioner John Richardson who lives in Hernando Beach spent the weekend helping victims and leading the on-scene effort to provide emergency services.

Two men, however, emerged as heroes by risking their lives. Tom and Scott Browning spent most of Saturday ferrying by airboat frightened Hernando Beach residents from their flooded homes to higher ground.

They piloted the craft through 60 mph wind gusts to get people

**A chance to say 'Thanks...'**